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Spaces for critique

*Tracing public debate in architectural magazines
in the GDR in the 1970s and 1980s*

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To those who continue to believe in change

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Framing the question: Architecture and public debate in the 'late socialist' GDR

The collapse of the socialist regime in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the autumn months of 1989 not only meant the end of a social formation that existed for the past 40 years, its dissolution also included the disintegration of a specific public sphere with its characteristic forms of communication, debate and publicity. This specific public found its expression in different media – and perhaps longest lasting – in the architecture that it produced. The built environment formed the space in which the socialist public realised itself materially, and at the same time provided the context for living for its members, and thus represented the locus from which socialist society continuously reproduced itself. When the GDR with its social system ceased to exist, its built heritage remained in a reunified Germany and has since become an object of public debate and academic study. However, since the fall of the wall almost 20 years ago, it still appears as though the relics of socialist construction are predominantly judged from an aesthetic point of view with an often one-sided emphasis on their shortcomings, thus reducing all GDR architecture to no more than the 'Platte', the infamous prefabricated concrete panel buildings that can be found across the country¹. While such reductionist patterns often go hand in hand with politically motivated historical accounts of the former 'socialist state on German soil' that condemn the latter as a strictly authoritarian dictatorship whose regime forcefully sought to ban public debate on every level, they also raise questions as to the conditions of production of GDR architecture, its various revisions and stylistic permutations.² As such, one might question how the socialist regime would have sustained itself for 40 years without internal controversy, but purely on the basis of exercising power from above³, one

1 See Florian Urban, 'The Invention of the Historic City: Building the Past in East Berlin 1970-1990', D83 TU Berlin, 2006, p. 11

2 See Simone Hain, 'Zwischen Arkonaplatz und Nikolaiviertel. Stadt als soziale Form versus Inszenierung. Konflikte bei der Rückkehr in die Stadt.', in: Thorsten Scheer, Josef Paul Kleihues, Paul Kahlfeldt (eds.), *Stadt der Architektur – Architektur der Stadt. Berlin 1900-2000* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2000), p. 337

3 See Wolfgang Engler, *Die zivilisatorische Lücke. Versuche über den Staatssozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), p. 62

might also ask how GDR architecture would have developed the way it did in the complete absence of discussion or without any changes in policies.

It seems logical to assume that public debate in the former East, much the same as in the West, would have taken place in the media – i.e. newspapers, journals, books, films, as well as on radio or television. The GDR is often referred to as a 'Leseland' (reading country) with respect to books, but did the same apply to journals and magazines? And what can these media reveal about the characteristics and conditions of the public sphere in the GDR? It is widely acknowledged that the 'market' of periodical publications in the socialist state was characterised by 'relative uniformity, tedium, and monotony due to a lack of choice and competition.'⁴ Usually, each profession, interest group or particular aspect of life was covered by only one magazine or journal.⁵ This was also true for architecture. Between 1952 and 1989 only one chief architectural magazine existed: *Deutsche Architektur*, renamed *Architektur der DDR* in 1974. To assert that a public sphere in the western sense did not exist given this uniformity, and in a situation in which the media were strictly tied to the state power, and where any publication per se, was political would appear inevitable, yet at the same time, it would also put an end to this enquiry and exclude any new insights. Because of architecture's social relevance and the fact that it overlapped with other fields, discussions about the built environment were not confined to the profession, its organs, institutions and their members. Debate was often displaced into alternative realms at the margins or beyond disciplinary boundaries, where it benefited from greater freedom, and arguably proved more effective. It would thus seem a promising task to reformulate the question of the public in the former GDR with a view to tracing phenomena that lay outside the official public sphere in an alternative public with particular qualities and a specific effectiveness.⁶

4 Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, Siegfried Lokatis, 'Abenteuer im Zeitschriften-Leseland DDR', Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, Siegfried Lokatis (Eds.), *Zwischen "Mosaik" und "Einheit": Zeitschriften in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1999), p. 13 (translation by the author)

5 Ibid., p. 15 (translation by the author)

6 Ibid., p. 13 The authors refer to W. Engler (see their footnote)

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It is the objective of this investigation to discuss these questions about the public sphere under real existing socialism through the lens of architecture, in particular through an analysis of public debates in architectural and subject related magazines of the GDR in the 1970s and the 1980s. In so doing, this study seeks to trace spaces for critical debate about the former socialist state's built environment in certain media, while also attempting to elucidate nuances between these different media and their contingent critiques within the restraints of state and self-censored publication. The focus of this work is on four different periodical publications that were published in different contexts, by different institutions and organisations: firstly, the magazine *Deutsche Architektur/ Architektur der DDR*, conjointly published by the Union of Architects of the GDR and the Building Academy of the GDR, secondly, the journal *Architektur und bildende Kunst*, published by the Central working group architecture and visual arts of the Union of Architects of the GDR and the Union of Artists of the GDR, thirdly, the little magazine/ newsletter *babl*, published by the Berlin group of the Union of Architects of the GDR, and lastly, the industrial design magazine *Form + Zweck*, the only non-architectural magazine, published by the Department for industrial design.

It is often stated, that a broad public debate about the subject of architecture and urban design never existed in the former GDR, and this work may contribute little to counter this view.⁷ Nonetheless, there have been several attempts to establish public debate and to stimulate critique within professional organisations, on the level of local groups, or in interdisciplinary realms. Thus, the problem of the public and of public debate in the former GDR presents itself in a twofold way, and it would be possible to tell its story from two different sides: as a story of its failure on the one hand, and as a story of possibilities on the other. This work tries to consider both, and seeks to develop a complex as well as balanced historical account of the magazines and their potentials and limitations in providing a forum for critical public debate in a time that was characterised by pressing questions and growing contradictions. Charles S. Maier's study of the dissolution of the socialist GDR, which

⁷ See Bruno Flierl, *Gebaute DDR. Über Architekten, Stadtplaner und die Macht* (Berlin: Verlag für Bauwesen, 1998), pp. 71-2

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offers a wide ranging analysis of the historical, political, economical, social and cultural conditions in the GDR in the phase of late socialism, strongly informed this study. His accounts of the decaying public sphere of the state and the concept of *Eigen-Sinn*, with which he describes the formation of dissent in an increasingly diversifying society, proved particularly fruitful in relation to the questions raised in this work.

Reflecting the above-mentioned two sided character of the phenomenon of public debate in architectural magazines in the last 20 years of socialist East Germany, this investigation is divided into two parts. While the first part comprises one chapter that focusses on *Deutsche Architektur/ Architektur der DDR* as an example for the failure to establish public debate on a broad level, and discusses the magazine as representing the decaying dominant public sphere of the state and its institutions, the second part, in four smaller chapters, first develops theoretical models with which to describe alternative spaces for critique, and then examines three different publications that can be interpreted as attempts to form such alternative spaces in the field of architecture and urban design and in interdisciplinary realms.

The main source of information were the magazines themselves. They were supplemented by archive material and contemporary literature that helped to establish the wider historical context. Furthermore, more recent historical and architectural historical studies and essays were used to gain an overview of the subject, the context of research and the various interpretative and theoretical models that have so far been employed to analyse the architecture and architectural debates of the last two decades of the GDR. However, none of these sources were as valuable as the conversations with the different actors that were either directly involved in the making of the magazines that are discussed here, or that were otherwise connected to them, for instance as contributors. Not only did their personal memories help to elucidate the complexities of personal involvement and self-imposed censorship and thus helped to better understand the nuances within the published texts in the magazines, but they also drew my attention to the importance of inter-

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personal relationships and solidarity. Conscious that these oral histories may be biased precisely because of the interviewees' personal involvement in the studied groups and magazines, they were used cautiously in this study.

Architecture without an architectural public? The magazine 'Deutsche Architektur/ Architektur der DDR' and its limitations

In April 1990, only a few months after the fall of the wall, the West German architectural magazine *Arch+* published an issue under the controversial title 'Architektur ohne Architekten' ("Architecture Without Architects"), which sought to provide insights about the characteristics and conditions of the profession in the 'other' Germany beyond the disintegrating border. It also, at an early stage, raised questions as to what might remain of the GDR and which problems its dissolution addresses in relation to architecture in a post-socialist future. The lead article by editors Nikolaus Kuhnert and Philipp Oswalt is of particular interest because of the theses it developed around a distinction between 'Entwerferarchitektur' (designer architecture) and 'Apparatarchitektur' (apparatus architecture), which the authors, however, saw as false alternatives. The question at the centre of their argument is whether the 'return to claims of the autonomy of the discipline, the course correction of all decisions taken towards modernism', and thus the 'return to designer architecture is a consequence of 50 years of Stalinism', and if not an after-effect of historic developments then at least supported (or even justified) by the latter.⁸ 'Any attempts at overcoming architecture would have miserably failed; [p]revailed had only the *apparatus* which then lead to the abandonment of architects and of architecture'⁹ [emphasis added], Kuhnert and Oswalt summarise the lines of the argument that would lead to such a conclusion. But how does this relate to the question of architecture and public debate in the former GDR?

The word apparatus does not only denote machine, and in this respect refers to the new tools and methods for the production of architecture developed under modernism, but also implies

⁸ See Nikolaus Kuhnert und Philipp Oswalt, 'Entwerferarchitektur/ Apparatarchitektur. Thesen zu einer falschen Alternative, *Arch+*, No 103 (Architektur ohne Architekten), (Aachen: Arch+ Verlag GmbH, 1990), p. 41 (translation by the author)

⁹ Ibid., p. 41 (translation by the author)

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the system at large, most notably the apparatus of the state. Under the conditions of socialism in the GDR these two meanings of apparatus were inextricably tied to each other, the modes of production (not only) of architecture and the system in which production took place formed a unity. If, in this light, one was to follow the argument that the architect as an individual got lost under the dictum of the apparatus, one might also argue that individual opinion, its expression, distribution and discussion were forfeited under such conditions. Given the central role these characteristics take in the context of the public sphere, one could therefore ask, whether the architecture of the GDR was not only an “architecture without architects”, but also one without an architectural public. Put in a different way, did the socialist state's 'Apparatarchitektur' consequently eliminate public debate about and within architecture, and if so to what extent?

The case of the magazine *Deutsche Architektur*, renamed into *Architektur der DDR* in 1974, in the wake of the changes to the GDR's constitution, can be seen to exemplify this lack of public debate in the context of architecture under the paradigm of the apparatus, not least because of its status as the profession's only widely published medium until the end of the GDR. The magazine was established in 1952 and continued to exist until 1991. During those years, it was lead by three different chief editors, the last of them, Gerhard Krenz, held the position for more than 27 years. With a print run of 10,000 issues it was not only read by members of the profession, but also reached a wider audience interested in the subject, which, as Flierl points out, 'may suggest that the reconstruction and reconfiguration of cities in the GDR was an object of general public interest'.¹⁰ The magazine's main task was 'to promote the development of urban design and architecture adequately and in tune with the aim of establishing socialist society in the GDR'.¹¹ Despite this, the magazine's aims and focus shifted within the framework of this greater goal in accordance with changing social, economical, political and ideological agendas as well as under the auspices of its

¹⁰ See Bruno Flierl, 'Anspruchsvoll und waghalsig? Die Zeitschrift *Deutsche Architektur/ Architektur der DDR* (1952 bis 1990)', Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, Siegfried Lokatis (Eds.), *Zwischen "Mosaik" und "Einheit": Zeitschriften in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1999), p. 252 (translation by the author)

¹¹ Ibid., p. 253 (translation by the author)

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respective chief editors. Flierl, who was Editor in Chief of the magazine for only two and a half years between 1962 and 1964, and who was removed from his post after attempting to turn *Deutsche Architektur* into a forum for critical discussion with an increasingly open, current, international and ambitious character, describes this shift as turning from an 'Überbau-Zeitschrift' (magazine of the superstructure) into a 'Bauwesen-Zeitschrift' (magazine for the state construction system).¹² The former term refers to the first years of the magazine's existence, the early 1950s, in which it was primarily aimed at 'politically-ideologically winning architects and urban designers for the task of *building* socialism in the GDR and focussing their production on works that help to promote a positive and forward-looking image of socialist development'¹³ [emphasis added]. The second term denotes the magazine's altered role since the mid-1960s in promoting and fostering the state's architectural agendas and building programmes, most notably the housing programme, following the restructuring and central reorganisation of the entire construction system.

Excursus 1: The magazine and its publishing institutions

This shift also becomes evident in the changing roles of the two central architectural institutions involved in the magazine's publication and the changes to their internal structural. The magazine was initially published by the Building Academy, the GDR's central institution for architectural research, and later jointly published with the German Union of Architects (BDA), the central organisation in which members of the profession were united. Both institutions were renamed Building Academy of the GDR and Union of Architects of the GDR (BdA/DDR) respectively at the beginning of the 1970s, roughly at the same time when the magazine changed its name to *Architektur der DDR*. While the Building Academy's emphasis in the early post-war years was chiefly on developing a political-ideological basis for the architecture of the socialist state, thus stressing the importance of architectural history and theory, the focus of research gradually shifted away from analysing and theorising general principles of urban planning, development and design towards

¹² Ibid., p. 257 (translation by the author)

¹³ Ibid., p. 253 (translation by the author)

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technical, technological and economical problems in connection with the general change in policy towards the implementation of industrial construction.¹⁴ This process of diminution of theoretical questions also entailed the abandonment of criticism and public debate about architecture, as Flierl summarises:

Theory and history of architecture and urban design – highly appreciated in the early years of the GDR, especially as an ideological 'compass' for future architectural practice – successively lost their importance in later years under the autocratic administration of the state construction system. Criticism of planning and architecture were virtually forbidden, as they were effectively put on a level with critique of the construction industry and thus of the state as a whole. Accordingly, criticism only existed in the form of analyses of achievements, that is analyses of success. And even those, if anything, were only allowed to circulate internally. In this light, critical debate about the goals and outcomes of construction, urban design and architecture in a broad public context was rendered impossible. Who nonetheless attempted to establish the same, had to reckon to be unmasked as an enemy of the GDR.¹⁵

The second institution involved in the publication of the architectural magazine, the BdA, underwent structural changes comparable to those of the Building Academy and contributed hardly more than the latter to establishing, promoting and maintaining public debate on a broader level. The BdA was the central professional organisation of architects and urban planners, and was a 'typical social organisation of the GDR, in which the interests of its members should be brought in line with the interests of society',¹⁶ and was in this respect, completely different from its West German counterpart. Under the same ideological paradigm as the Building Academy, the Union of Architects was initially conceived as a 'Transmissionsriemen' of the party, that is as an institution whose main purpose was to develop and organise 'Wiederaufbau' (the rebuilding of the cities following WW II), and in this process communicate the decisions and ideological programmes of the party to the

¹⁴ See Bruno Flierl, *Gebaute DDR. Über Architekten, Stadtplaner und die Macht* (Berlin: Verlag für Bauwesen, 1998), pp. 71-2, pp. 57-8

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 58 (translation by the author)

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 68 (translation by the author)

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architects at the base.¹⁷ Hence it was strictly organised and strongly hierarchical. Nonetheless, there remained space for productive, creative and critical debate, in particular among the producers at the base of the organisation, the architects and urban designers themselves as well as in expert or specific working groups, on the regional level of the Bezirke (districts), and in seminars and small publications that these groups organised. The outcomes of these debates, however, often had relatively little effect, since the ideas that developed at the base either got completely lost until they reached the top, or were blocked outright as soon as they began to question decisions, the function and legitimacy of certain legislations and/ or the bodies who carried responsibility for the same. The effectiveness of the BdA was thus limited to its base; it remained confined to providing a sense of solidarity, strength and mutual support among its members at the level of normal architects and urban designers, but did not help the latter to reach a wider audience, for instance through the architectural magazine it published.¹⁸

Even though the BdA may have helped to offer an internal professional public sphere for urban planners and architects, it did not succeed to attain a wider public audience for its members. In return, the latter did not benefit from the former and vice versa. The media distributed the proclamations and resolutions of state and party leaders in the construction sector and documented confirmed results as fulfilment of the plan. A lively discussion about the aims, tasks, and problems as well as good, less good and bad results of planning and architecture between everyone involved in the social process of construction in public and with greatest possible openness did not exist.¹⁹

(end of excursus)

17 Bruno Flierl used the word Transmissionsriemen in the interview that I carried out with him, Interview between author and Bruno Flierl (Berlin, 24 July 2008)

18 Interview between author and Bruno Flierl (Berlin, 24 July 2008), see also Bruno Flierl, *Gebaute DDR. Über Architekten, Stadtplaner und die Macht* (Berlin: Verlag für Bauwesen, 1998), p. 69 (translation by the author)

19 Bruno Flierl, *Gebaute DDR. Über Architekten, Stadtplaner und die Macht* (Berlin: Verlag für Bauwesen, 1998), p. 70 (translation by the author)

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Under the control of those two institutions and its chief editor Gerhard Krenz, the magazine *Deutsche Architektur/ Architektur der DDR* failed to become a forum for public debate about architecture at the heart of the discipline on the one hand, and between the discipline and a wider public on the other.²⁰ The structural and ideological changes in the state construction system and its administration, and the industrialisation and centralisation of the building production involved cutting off critical discussions about architecture in public and thus created a void at the centre of architecture and urban design. Throughout the 1970s, in the wake of the implementation of the housing programme at which all architectural production from that point was directed, this void continued to grow and proved particularly problematic in the context of the diminishing economic power of the GDR during the 1980s. The system's inability for renewal went in hand with the abandonment of the forums in which this need for renewal could be addressed and publicly debated.²¹

At the beginning of the 1970s, shortly before the implementation of the housing programme, a turn occurred within the architecture of the GDR. This change, as Simone Hain argues, was brought about by the sober calculations of the first mass data processing computers as much as by sociologist's analyses of the problems and needs of the users of (the old and new) architecture. Both delivered unsparing accounts of the state's material resources and real living conditions. The general census (Volks-, Berufs-, Wohnraum- und Gebäudezählung) of 1971 in particular had established that the state's construction policies that largely concentrated on new construction urgently needed to change. The results of this census proved that the largest part of the population still lived in existing old tenements, and that while these presented a significant economic asset, nearly 50 percent of the

20 In my interview with him, Wolfgang Kil stressed that very little initiative ever came from Gerhard Krenz, Interview between author and Wolfgang Kil (Berlin, 23 July 2008), see also Bruno Flierl, 'Anspruchsvoll und waghalsig? Die Zeitschrift *Deutsche Architektur/ Architektur der DDR* (1952 bis 1990)', Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, Siegfried Lokatis (Eds.), *Zwischen "Mosaik" und "Einheit": Zeitschriften in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1999), p. 256

21 See Bruno Flierl, 'Anspruchsvoll und waghalsig? Die Zeitschrift *Deutsche Architektur/ Architektur der DDR* (1952 bis 1990)', Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, Siegfried Lokatis (Eds.), *Zwischen "Mosaik" und "Einheit": Zeitschriften in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1999), pp. 256-7

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Fig. 1: The unity of old and new? Title of the magazine Deutsche Architektur 10/ 1971

Fig. 2: Visualising the complex economy of urban design: Illustration accompanying Silvio Macetti's theoretical model, published in Deutsche Architektur 10/ 1971

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existing housing stock was in a very poor condition, highly deteriorated, and thus considered unsuitable for socialist life.²² In the October issue of the same year, *Deutsche Architektur* published an article by Silvio Macetti with the title 'Ökonomie der Stadt und komplexe Ökonomie des Städtebaus' (Economy of the city and complex economy of urban planning), which discussed the economy of time in urban planning as a complex unity of the economy of production, the economy of maintenance and preservation and the economy of use, and which called for more careful consideration and qualitative evaluation of existing old buildings and greater wariness of establishing their use-value purely quantitatively.²³ Signalling the shift in architectural debates towards a re-evaluation of the historic city that was to concern officials, scientists, architects and users for more than the next decade, but which remained a controversial subject in relation to official construction agendas and policies of the GDR until the regime's end, Macetti's article was both ambitious and perspicacious in the questions and critiques that it raised. It however remained a rare if not singular example for critical discussion about urban regeneration within the magazine *Deutsche Architektur/ Architektur der DDR*, and arguably within a wider public, at least until the magazine *Form + Zweck* in the first issue of 1983 put its finger on the wound again.²⁴

Excursus 2: Critical discussion in a time of contradictions

But what exactly made the subject of urban renewal so controversial? Why did it remain largely foreclosed from public debate and critical discussion in the architectural magazine *Architektur der DDR*, while simultaneously developing into a central issue for architecture and urban

²² See Simone Hain, 'Über Turmbauer und Schwarzbrotbäcker: Gebaute Landschaft DDR', in *Zwei deutsche Architekturen 1949-1989* (Stuttgart: Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen e.V., 2004), pp. 37-9 and Simone Hain, 'Zwischen Arkonaplatz und Nikolaiviertel. Stadt als soziale Form versus Inszenierung. Konflikte bei der Rückkehr in die Stadt.', in: Thorsten Scheer, Josef Paul Kleihues, Paul Kahlfeldt (eds.), *Stadt der Architektur – Architektur der Stadt. Berlin 1900-2000* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2000), p. 339

²³ Silvio Macetti, 'Ökonomie der Stadt und komplexe Ökonomie des Städtebaus', in: *Deutsche Architektur* 10/1971 (Berlin: Verlag für Bauwesen, 1971), pp. 586-592, see also Simone Hain, 'Zwischen Arkonaplatz und Nikolaiviertel. Stadt als soziale Form versus Inszenierung. Konflikte bei der Rückkehr in die Stadt.', in: Thorsten Scheer, Josef Paul Kleihues, Paul Kahlfeldt (eds.), *Stadt der Architektur – Architektur der Stadt. Berlin 1900-2000* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2000), p. 339

²⁴ See chapter 5

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planning in the last 20 years of the GDR? A broader look at the social and political development of the GDR in this period may help elucidate this paradox. The years following the accession of Erich Honecker as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party in 1971 (and his subsequent election as Chair of the State Council in 1976) were a time in which the system gained stability on the one hand, especially because of the GDR's shifting role in international affairs, but in which its inner contradictions on the other hand deepened further, most notably during the 1980s. This phase of 'late socialism' was characterized by a paradoxical simultaneity of certain phenomena, such as consolidation and economic crisis, increasing social welfare and perpetuating constraints on civil rights and individual freedom, the ongoing differentiation of society and the state's continuing claims of a 'people', as well as the re-discovery of localism and history and the officials' insistence on the paradigm of progress.²⁵ The regime's failure was its inability to bridge the contradictions that became manifest on all levels of society during these years. Instead of entering a process of democratisation and encouraging debate within a socialist public, the officials were concerned to suppress discussions wherever possible. Rather than trying to overcome the system's antagonisms, the rulers strategically played them against each other, and thus effectively compromised the notion of a public sphere, as they became aware of its potential danger to the system.²⁶ The debates that surrounded the process of re-evaluation of the historic city in this phase could be interpreted as similarly threatening, and for that reason may have remained a controversial subject until the end of the GDR. Not only did the shift towards the historic city and its tenements pose ideological issues, since it involved the acceptance of a typology that developed under the conditions of 19th century capitalism, it also addressed a general change of policy towards the modernist agenda. It furthermore had economic and administrative implications; the latter proving particularly problematic, as the different parameters of working within an existing context necessitated decentralisation, a shift of power away from the central institutions into the hands of local bodies, possibly even involving discussions at the base between all parties including the general public.

²⁵ See Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution. The Crisis of Communism and the end of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 32-52

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 32-52



Fig. 3: 'Not "people" but "society" was emerging as the key reformist political idea.' (Maier), Straßenfest Oderberger Straße (street party Oderberger Straße) by Harald Hauswald

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While urban regeneration resembled and emphasised ideas of particularism and the concept of the individual that developed in the social sciences at the time, the administration's housing programme and the social and economic agendas connected to it seemed to rest on an older reductionist model of society that forcefully united all its members under the claim of a "people"²⁷. In such a model, the party saw itself and the collective organisations and institutions of the state that it governed as the mouthpiece of the totality of society, and assumed legitimacy to act on behalf of all people on the basis of a self-conception as embodying the victory of the working class. How could it not know the needs of the worker when it was the workers? How could its actions fail to represent the individual when it was the collective individual? And how in return could the experience and opinion of the individual be any different from that of the party? Charles S. Maier summarises this interrelation:

Under Honecker, there was no possibility of abandoning the party's claim to remain the privileged political force. Neo-Stalinist formulas were invoked for a last time: Everything with the people, everything through the people, everything for the people. But Volk was a concept that had a Stalinist (and earlier a National Socialist) history. It suggested a monolithic popular will that could be delegated to a ruling party put in charge of arranging all of public and private life. Not "people" but "society" was emerging as the key reformist political idea.²⁸

(end of excursus)

The socialist regime's assumed legitimacy to exert control over opinion may be the reason for the disappearance of the column 'kritik + meinungen' (criticism and opinions) from the pages of *Deutsche Architektur/ Architektur der DDR* over the course of the 1970s²⁹, or the complete absence of letters to the editor from both architects and non-professionals. It may also have lead to

27 Simone Hain's essay 'Zwischen Arkonaplatz und Nikolaiviertel' develops the concept of particularism and individualisation in the architecture of the 1970s and 1980s, see Simone Hain, 'Zwischen Arkonaplatz und Nikolaiviertel. Stadt als soziale Form versus Inszenierung. Konflikte bei der Rückkehr in die Stadt.', in: Thorsten Scheer, Josef Paul Kleihues, Paul Kahlfeldt (eds.), *Stadt der Architektur – Architektur der Stadt. Berlin: 1900-2000* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2000), p. 339

28 Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution. The Crisis of Communism and the end of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 50

29 Issue 10/ 1971 still comprises the column, while issue 7/ 1976 and subsequent issues miss it

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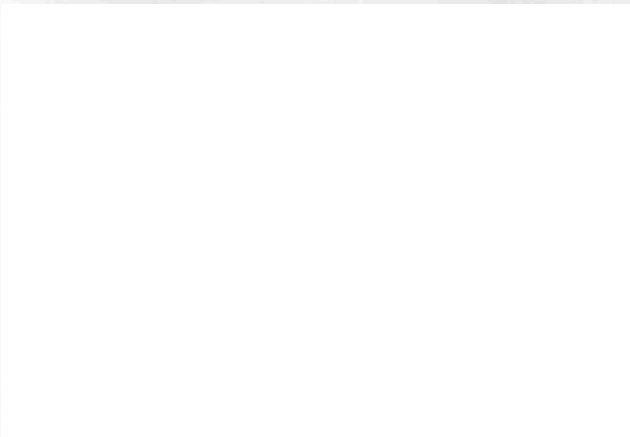


Fig. 4: Derelict and obsolete? The relics of capitalist urban development around Arkonaplatz, photograph published in Deutsche Architektur 10/ 1971



Fig. 5: Wish and reality: The unrealised clubhouse Swinemünder Straße as part of the Arkonaplatz scheme, Deutsche Architektur 10/ 1971



Fig. 6: Sketch of the unrealised clubhouse Swinemünder Straße as part of the Arkonaplatz scheme, published in Deutsche Architektur 10/ 1971

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Fig. 6: Socialist life in capitalist heritage? Photograph of the Arnimplatz reconstruction area, published in Architektur der DDR, 7/ 1976

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Fig. 7: Upgraded for the benefit of the people. Photograph of a nursery in the regenerated Arkonaplatz area, published in Architektur der DDR, 4/ 1984



Fig. 8: Better conditions for the further development of the socialist way of life. Photograph published in Architektur der DDR, 4/ 1984

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the limited critical discussions about the subject of urban regeneration in the magazine, and the relative absence of agent's voices in these discussions. It would, however, be incorrect to assert that *Deutsche Architektur/ Architektur der DDR* did not cover the subject of reconstruction of historic quarters and buildings at all, and that architects and planners were excluded as authors of the same. Rather the opposite was the case. There were a number of issues that specifically dealt with the subject of reconstruction, most notably the already mentioned October issue of 1971 and the July issue of 1976. Both of these issues, among other articles that dealt with the reconstruction of historic quarters, featured articles about the two prestige projects of reconstruction in East Berlin: the 'Arkonaplatz' project in the district Mitte and the 'Arnimplatz' project in the district Prenzlauer Berg. Both articles were published by the architects involved in the projects, and arguably sought to provide as complex and critical accounts of the ongoing construction works as possible. They are, however, also characterised by continuous praising of the state's official architectural agendas. Two later articles, published in the September issue of 1979 and the April issue of 1984, go even further in vigorously expressing their affirmation of the rulers' policies. The 1984 article about the finished 'Arkonaplatz' project concludes:

The results [of the Arkonaplatz project] are an expression of the great social and cultural achievements of our state for the benefit of its people, for their well-being and joy, and confirms that the housing programme as the main point of the Socialist Unity Party's social policies is purposefully being realised.

The example of urban reconstruction shows how strongly *Architektur der DDR* was tied to ideologies and official opinions of the state, and served as the mouthpiece of its dominant public sphere. Reconstruction could not be critically discussed as an independent strategy, because such discussions may have lead to a criticism of the state's official construction policies that, in fact, contributed to the ongoing dereliction of historic cities and districts. Instead it had to be ideologically subsumed under the paradigm of the housing programme.

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Fig. 9: Reinstated old tenements on the title page of the construction system's central magazine. *Architektur der DDR* 4/ 1984

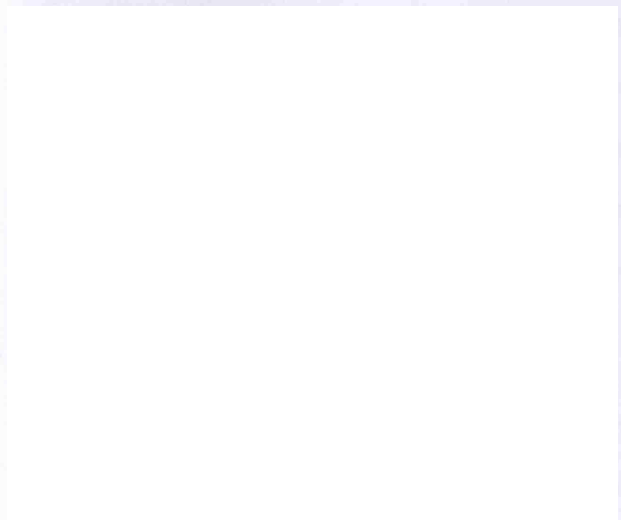


Fig. 10: Subsumed under the housing programme: Erich Honecker hands over the 1.000.000th 'new' flat in the Prenzlauer Berg reconstruction area. Photograph published in *Architektur der DDR* 4/ 1984

Niches or counter-public? In search of alternative spaces for debate and critique

The socialist leaders of the GDR may have attempted to gain total control over the public sphere and public opinion by controlling the media and the publication system, by imposing censorship (or suggesting modifications as was the official terminology), or by systematically invading its citizens' private lives through collective activities, institutions, organisations and a system of surveillance. However, despite all these efforts, there always remained spaces for debate, critique and dissent on all levels of society, among those who disavowed the party as well as among some with affiliations to it. These spaces grew along with the increasing social diversification during the 1970s and became firmly established in the years of economical and political stagnation in the 1980s. Nonetheless, their influence on the system as a whole remained of limited significance in comparison to the civil rights groups and alternative publics that gained influence in other states of the Eastern Bloc at the same time. The spaces for critique that existed in the GDR often seem dispersed and linked to interpersonal relationships, small groups, specific interests, local or neighbourhood issues. 'At best there were fragmented partial publics – dissenting writers, young intellectuals, church enclaves, timid faculties – but no general civic public until the very end.'³⁰ In turn the state to a certain degree accepted their existence, which may have further impeded their broader influence, or as the Leipzig artist Hans-Joachim Schulze put it, '[t]he greatest penalty for an artist in the GDR was to be able to do as one pleased'³¹.

This model of partial publics may largely be seen to apply to the different attempts at establishing critical public debate about architecture in different working groups within professional

30 Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution. The Crisis of Communism and the end of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 37

31 Quoted in: Paul Kaiser, Claudia Petzold, 'Schimmelblumen an der Pleiße: Facetten der vielgestaltigen Leipziger Boheme: Klaus Rudolf, Lutz Nitzsche, Hans-Joachim Schulze und Jens-Paul Wollenberg', in: Paul Kaiser, Claudia Petzold, *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR: Gruppen, Konflikte, Quartiere. 1970-1989* (Berlin: Fannei & Walz, Deutsches Historisches Museum, 1997), p. 217 (translation by the author)

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organisations such as the BdA, or in the little magazines that were initiated by the latter's local group members, or in magazines that officially operated outside the disciplinary boundaries of architecture, but which covered fields that were connected to it, for instance the design magazine *Form + Zweck*. But how can these different attempts be theorised and understood in the context of a wider question about the conditions of the public in the former GDR? Were they mere refuges, or aimed at creating permanent spaces for discussion within, or did they even mark a departure from the dominant and institutionalised public sphere of the state, and could thus be interpreted as counter-publics?

Many accounts, even those of former agents, often refer to the concept of a 'society of niches' in order to describe the alternative spaces that existed in opposition to the official public³². Günter Gaus, 'the first permanent representative of the Federal Republic in the GDR from 1974 through 1981, popularized th[is] idea of a society of niches, or private refuges, in which the GDR residents increasingly lived their real lives'³³. In his historical study of the late GDR and the regime's dissolution, Charles S. Maier, however, strongly contests this popular conception and seeks to uncover its deficiencies. He argues, that the concept of niches is flawed, because in the context of 'real existing socialism' it contributed to affirming or even fostering the regime, as 'it threatened to disarm outside critics, especially those in the West who wanted to believe Ostpolitik had made life less repressive for the East Germans', while in the eyes of dissenters inside, the society of niches 'continued to mask continued repression'.³⁴ Instead, Maier proposes a different model, that of '*Eigen-Sinn*', as a more effective concept to describe the development of an increasingly diverse society contrasted by a new orthodoxy within the regime that continuously failed to account for difference and particularity.

Contemporary historians of East Germany have applied the concept of *Eigen-Sinn* (a sense of

32 The word niches fell several times in my interviews with the different witnesses to history. It is furthermore referred to in and a text by Wolfgang Kil, see: Wolfgang Kil, 'Prenzlauer Berg: Aufstieg und Fall einer Nische', in: Hans G Helms (ed.), *Die Stadt als Gabentisch. Beobachtungen der aktuellen Städtebauentwicklung* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1992)

33 Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution. The Crisis of Communism and the end of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 29

34 Ibid., pp. 29-30

Niches or counter-public? In search of alternative spaces for debate and critique

one's own interests) to describe a trend less toward private life than toward maintenance of one's own "space" or sphere of autonomous action within public institutions, the workplace above all. Such behaviour was possible less for individuals than groups of workers: team activity might reassert meaningful public participation. [...] 'A concept such as *Eigen-Sinn* thus allows historical research to explore how citizens constructed daily life without succumbing to oppression or despair.'³⁵

The concept of *Eigen-Sinn* denotes the attempts of a younger generation of dissenters to create 'a sort of permanently subversive sphere' in which they could operate more freely and independently.³⁶ This new generation's approaches to creating alternative spaces for debate and critique, according to Maier, also implied a shift in critical practice away from personalised, subjective, and highly intellectual, more hidden critiques towards everyday experiences, popular culture and open confrontations of social questions in general.³⁷ In light of the concurrent shifts in debate in architecture in the 1970s and 1980s, the concept of *Eigen-Sinn* would prove very useful to analysing the different ways in which architects, architectural historians, theorists and critics as well as sociologists tried to stimulate wider public debates about architecture and urban planning in opposition to official public opinion, while at the same time remaining within the framework of existing institutions, organisations and publications.

But would such an interpretation sufficiently cover all different aspects and phenomena of the alternative spaces for critique that developed within the discipline of architecture and within GDR society at large at that time? Does the concept of *Eigen-Sinn* not fall short of describing attempts at departure from the dominant public sphere of the state and at creating a counter-public? The concept of the counter-public is connected to the work of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, who developed the idea of a proletarian public sphere in opposition to the hegemonic public sphere of

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 36-7

³⁶ Ibid., p. 32

³⁷ Ibid, p. 32 'For younger intellectuals protest would find expression less in a tradition of high mandarin texts than in an underbrush of film, readings, graffiti, music, church-affiliated peace movements, or ecology actions.' (Maier)

Niches or counter-public? In search of alternative spaces for debate and critique

The image shows a street scene in Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin, during a street festival. The street is lined with colorful, multi-story residential buildings. In the foreground, there are people walking and standing, some looking towards the camera. The street is paved with cobblestones, and there are some small plants and trees along the sidewalks. The overall atmosphere is lively and festive.

Fig. 11: Prenzlauer Berg: niche or counter-public?, Straßenfest Jugendclub "Impuls" Czarnikauer Straße, Harald Hauswald

Niches or counter-public? In search of alternative spaces for debate and critique

the bourgeoisie, as theorised by Jürgen Habermas. Their criticism of Habermas's model derives from the bourgeois public's claim to represent society as a whole³⁸, while excluding central aspects of life from the public sphere, most notably the sphere of production. Negt und Kluge argue that this exclusion of the sphere of production from the public sphere serves to guarantee continuity and maintain the power of the dominant social class. While the worker's experiences develop in the sphere of production, these experiences have no influence on the public sphere because of the earlier's exclusion from the latter. Hence the worker faces the impossibility of utilising the public sphere to his needs and to liberate himself.³⁹ Of course, the regime of the GDR claimed to be the embodiment of the victory of the working class, but one must not forget that the rulers' assumed right to power, despite all references to class struggle, was not historically based on revolution, on overturning an old system of suppressors by the previously suppressed, but on the "construction of socialism".⁴⁰ Regardless of the state's continuing claims to act for and on behalf of the people, the socialist system of the former GDR was characterised by strict top-down organisation. Its leaders sought to change the productive relationships among its citizens below first and foremost by implementing the necessary structures to organise this change above. The institutions and organisations that the state created remained artificial and excluded from their user's living context, and hence formed a dominant public sphere that was as disconnected from the sphere of production and people's experience as the hegemonic bourgeois public sphere described by Negt und Kluge. Similarly, dissenters in the former GDR were not able to utilise this public sphere. Instead, they had to establish their own counter-publics in opposition to the public sphere of the state.

The alternative spaces of critique that the different periodical publications in the field of architecture and urban design in the 1970s and 1980s that will be discussed in the next chapters

38 Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (first published 1972), transl. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), Introduction, pp. xlv-xlvi

39 Ibid., see Chapters 1 and 2

40 Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution. The Crisis of Communism and the end of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 14 and p. 52

Niches or counter-public? In search of alternative spaces for debate and critique

represent, I will argue, show aspects of both Eigen-Sinn and counter-publics. They show attempts to carve out a permanent sphere within existing structures and institutions in order to maintain critical discussion and controversial debate about architecture as well as to create a different sphere in opposition to the the official public sphere of the state, its institutions, professional organisations, media and rules for publication.

Alternative spaces 1: The 'Zentrale Arbeitsgruppe (ZAG) Architektur und bildende Kunst' and its seminars and publications

One example of the different attempts at forming alternative spaces for a critique of the shortcomings of the GDR construction system was the 'Zentrale Arbeitsgruppe Architektur und bildende Kunst des BdA/ DDR and VBK/ DDR' (central working group architecture and visual arts of the Union of Architects of the GDR and the Union of artists of the GDR). Since its inception in the late 1960s, this working group became a forum for discussion among members of the disciplines of architecture and visual arts. Founded by the respective professional institutions, the East German Union of Architects and the Union of Artists, its chief aim was to establish and foster communication and debate about the design of urban spaces and buildings between the two different disciplines. 'Because it was not common to publish, to make books – this further contributed to the low intellectual level in the fields of urban design and architecture – or to lead controversial discussions articles, or even raise criticism, we usually practised oral communication', remembers architectural theorist Bruno Flierl, who was a member of the working group from the late 1960s, and who became its leader in 1975.⁴¹

Every two years, the group held seminars that discussed questions of urban design, and since the mid-1970s also managed to publish the results of these interdisciplinary seminars in a small journal called *Architektur und bildende Kunst*. The publisher of this journal was the Union of Artists, who as an organisation proved more open to critical debate than the BdA. Flierl recalls that, 'nobody in the Ministry of Construction would have published our texts'.⁴² These little journals that were printed after each seminar had a print run of 1000 issues and were distributed in equal parts

⁴¹ 'Löcher im Bauch', interview with Bruno Flierl, *Arch+*, No 103 (Architektur ohne Architekten), (Aachen: Arch+ Verlag GmbH, 1990), p. 76 (translation by the author)

⁴² Ibid., p. 76 (translation by the author)

Alternative spaces 1: The 'Zentrale Arbeitsgruppe (ZAG) Architektur und bildende Kunst' and its seminars and publications

among members of both institutions. While this may at first suggest that both disciplines shared an equal role in the group, a closer look at the list of contributors and the contents of their essays as well as the general seminar topics, however, could raise the question whether the relationship between the two institutions involved in the group might not have been a rather functional one. Because open and critical discussions were not possible in the sphere of architecture, they had to be displaced into a different realm in which debate about architecture could be maintained.

The topics of the seminars ranged from 'Gestaltete Wohnumwelt' (The design of living environments) over 'Stadtbild and Stadtgestaltung' (Urban image and urban design), 'Farbe in der Stadt' (Colour in the city), to 'Komplexe Stadtgestaltung in den 80er Jahren: Theoretische Probleme' (Complex urban design in the 1980s: theoretical problems) to name but a few. While the latter was characterised by a particularly high level of theoretical discourse, the chief goal of all seminars appeared to be to raise theoretical questions in an increasingly undertheorised field. The contributions of theorists and critics such as Gerd Zimmermann and Olaf Weber from Weimar or Wolfgang Kil from Berlin exemplify this strong emphasis on theory within the working group, and the way in which theory served as a means to criticise the policies of the GDR construction system and the built results of these policies. The work presented by Zimmermann and Weber strongly drew on contemporary research in psychology, semiology and systems theory, and aimed at utilising this knowledge in order to formulate new theories about architecture and communication as well as about individual and collective perception of urban spaces. Wolfgang Kil's contributions critically questioned the totality of architecture and design as well as the role of the architect and the user, and called for particularity and greater participation.⁴³

⁴³ See for example: Gerd Zimmermann 'Stadtbild als Vorstellungsbild', Bericht über das Seminar und Beiträge (IRS Erkner, R1P 7/186) or: Wolfgang Kil, 'Oberflächen eine Chance für die Bewohner', *Architektur und bildende Kunst* (3) (Berlin: VBK, 1979) or: Dr. Olaf Weber, 'Entwicklungsprobleme der Architekturform – Neues durch Bekanntes mitteilen', *Architektur und bildende Kunst* (4) (Berlin: VBK, 1981) or: Dr. Gerd Zimmermann, 'Für alle Bereiche unserer Umwelt notwendig: Vielfalt', *Architektur und bildende Kunst* (4) (Berlin: VBK, 1981)

Alternative spaces 1: The 'Zentrale Arbeitsgruppe (ZAG) Architektur und bildende Kunst' and its seminars and publications

The course and development of the working group, however, was connected to no person as much as to its leader, Bruno Flierl. It was largely owing to his idealism and personal engagement that the working group developed into an enclave of *Eigen-sinn*, critical and theoretical debate within the BdA and VBK from the mid-1970s through the beginning of the 1980s. Furthermore, his ideas, particularly the concept of 'Komplexe Umweltgestaltung' which he presented to the group as early as 1974 and developed in subsequent years until it formed the centre of the controversial Erfurt seminar in 1981, gave the group its theoretical focus, while at the same time leading to a significant break in its development. This seminar, which marked the sad end of Bruno Flierl's career as the group's leader as well as an influential figure within the institutions of the GDR construction system, most importantly the BdA, is constantly referred to in autobiographical essays by and interviews with the architectural theorist. Its case, however, also illustrates one of the working group's key characteristics, that of solidarity among its members.

Organised by Flierl and others with the hope to stimulate new discussions about the development of architecture in the new decade, the Erfurt seminar centred around the topic of 'Komplexe Stadtgestaltung' (complex urban design), and sought to combine recent theories that signalled possibilities for change within society at large and the state's construction system in particular. The theories and positions presented by Flierl and the other contributors called for a revision of the superstructural character of the apparatus of the state and its institutions, for a shift of responsibilities into the hands of local administrations, for more transparency and public discussion, and, most importantly, for the user's participation in the process of designing the urban environment.⁴⁴ The ideas that were developed and discussed by the working group members in Erfurt, however, meant no less than the establishment of a critical public and the accomplishment of democratic principles. That such attempts at democratisation went well beyond what was acceptable to the leader's of the BdA (and the rulers in the state's ministries), specifically in the light of the

⁴⁴ 'Löcher im Bauch', interview with Bruno Flierl, *Arch+*, No 103 (Architektur ohne Architekten), (Aachen: Arch+ Verlag GmbH, 1990), p. 76 (translation by the author)

Alternative spaces 1: The 'Zentrale Arbeitsgruppe (ZAG) Architektur und bildende Kunst' and its seminars and publications

events in Poland at the time, seems clear from today's perspective.⁴⁵ As soon as the compiled seminar texts were rolling off the printers as issue 4 of *Architektur und bildende Kunst*, the whole print run had to be kept in unopened sacks in the basement of the BdA headquarter in Berlin. The issue was not allowed to be distributed among members of both the Union of Architects and the Union of Artists. Soon after, rumours spread about the potential consequences that this matter would have for those who were involved in it. A member of the BdA thus called the VBK to inform them of the recent events and Jochen Degenkolb, who was involved in the organisation and administration of the seminars on the Union of Artists side, on his own decided to collect all 400 issues designated for the VBK from the BdA's basement one night, package them and post them to everybody on the Union's distribution list. Because of an individual's spontaneous and extraordinarily brave action, 400 issues of *Architektur und bildende Kunst* (4) finally circulated in public.⁴⁶

As mentioned before, this incident not only marked the end of Bruno Flierl's involvement in the central working group, but also represented a break in the group's development. Subsequent issues of *Architektur und bildende Kunst* show that theoretical and critical debates in the group's seminars after Flierl was thrown out as its leader, failed to reach the same level as in previous years. Between the mid-1970s and 1981, the central working group architecture and visual arts, however, had developed into an alternative sphere in which critical theories and ideas about architecture and urban design in the GDR were generated and openly discussed among its members. The effects of those ideas on a wider public may have been limited, but the group's main achievement was that it succeeded to establish a partial public within and in-between the disciplines of architecture and art, characterised by *Eigen-sinn* as well as solidarity.

45 Solidarnosc in Poland, see 'Löcher im Bauch', interview with Bruno Flierl, *Arch+*, No 103 (Architektur ohne Architekten), (Aachen: Arch+ Verlag GmbH, 1990), p. 76

46 Interview between author and Wolfgang Kil (Berlin, 23 July 2008), and Wolfgang Kil, 'Ein Loblied auf die anonymen Köche: Beitrag zum Kolloquium anlässlich des 70. Geburtstags von Bruno Flierl in der Architektenkammer Berlin am 2. Februar 1997

Alternative spaces 2: The newsletters of the local BdA groups. 'babl' and beyond

In the same way as the central working group architecture and visual arts formed an alternative space for critical debate within one of the central architectural institutions of the former GDR, the Union of Architects (BdA), a number of newsletters that were published by the organisation's local groups also tried to offer alternative forums for discussion among architects and urban planners. While the example of *babl*, which was initiated in 1975 by a group of young architects around Jürgen Schöne, Michael Kny and Wolfgang Kil in Berlin, prepared the ground, other newsletters that had turned into little magazines slowly emerged over the course of the 1970s in cities like Rostock, Cottbus or Erfurt, to name but the significant ones. Authored and edited usually by 'normal' architects, these small periodical publications aimed at providing information as well as critical discussion about the organisation, the profession, official decisions, plans, agendas and local projects, both proposed and completed. Hence they signalled a demand for professional discussion and architectural criticism which other media, the central organ *Deutsche Architektur/ Architektur der DDR* above all, failed to provide.⁴⁷ *babl* in Berlin, *BIM* in Cottbus, *BdA Mitteilungen* in Erfurt and the newsletter by the Rostock BdA group exemplify how architectural debate was maintained on a local level.

The magazine *babl*, in this respect, represents a particularly interesting case. Published by the Berlin BdA group, it serves to illustrate the limits of possible criticism at the centre of power on the one hand, while on the other supporting the case of the local. As neglected as most of the other cities of the former GDR were, especially during the 1980s when all efforts were directed at shaping up the capital for its 750th anniversary, as much freedom did those 'provincial' parts of the GDR enjoy

⁴⁷ See Wolfgang Kil, 'In der Rückschau: Der Traum von der idealen Zeitung', Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, Siegfried Lokatis (Eds.), *Zwischen "Mosaik" und "Einheit": Zeitschriften in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1999), p. 259



Fig. 12: The makers of little magazines: the editorial board of babl in 1975, photograph published in babl 1



Fig. 13: Too ambitious, censored!, Title page of babl 1

Alternative spaces 2: The newsletters of the local BdA groups. 'babl' and beyond



Fig. 14: No sense of humour? Ironical poster accompanying babl 1

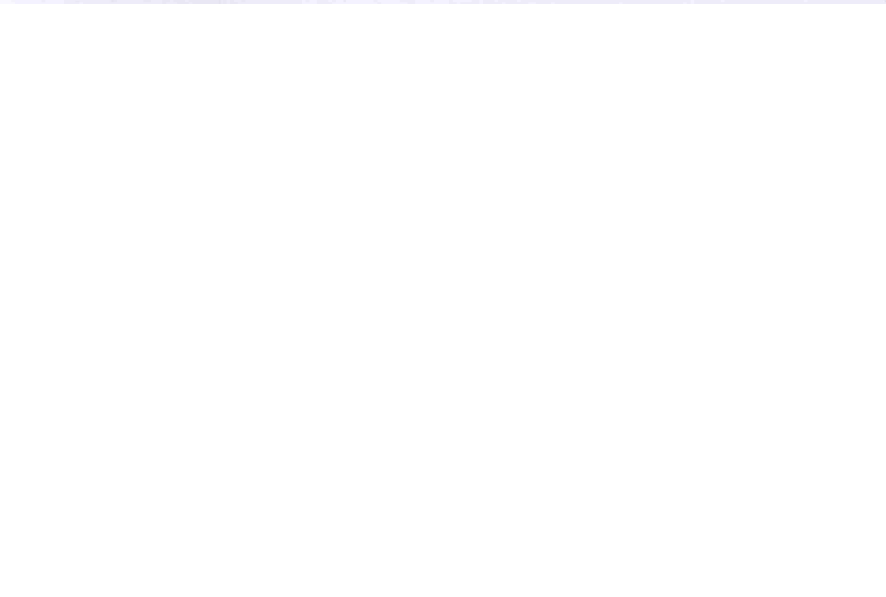


Fig. 15: Aphorisms, theory and discussion, pages from babl 1

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in comparison with Berlin. For the young team of founding editors of *babl* the dream of making their own magazine already ended after three issues, of which only one ever made its way into the hands of Berlin architects.⁴⁸

The idea for *babl* was originally developed by the architect Jürgen Schöne, who at the time worked at the Wohnungsbaukombinat (combine for housing construction) in Berlin. Apart from Schöne, the magazine's editorial board, among others, also included the architect Michael Kny⁴⁹ and Wolfgang Kil, who already had made himself known as an intelligent and critical commentator on the construction system in the GDR. As hopeless and despairing as these young architects' professional situation may have been at the time, the magazine gave them a perfect opportunity to critically engage with the unanswered questions that they all faced, Kil recalls.

We were in our mid-twenties, had just graduated, worked in different planning offices in Berlin and seriously quarrelled with the GDR construction system, which had just reached the peak of its technocratic and bureaucratic numbness. The concrete panel construction and the dictates of the concrete factories were implemented all over the country. From the state's side no one would lift a finger for the preservation of the derelict historic cities. Our professional title was not “architect” but “engineer for development and design”. It was unbearable. And that's why we snapped at the chance when the newly elected leader of the Union of Architects (BdA) in Berlin had offered us young bigmouths to make a little BdA-magazine. In this magazine we wanted to combine everything that we missed in the only official professional magazine, Architektur der DDR: fresh information, background stories, criticism, reviews, and, always praised but never realised, controversial debates.⁵⁰

48 The newsletter was continued by other architects after, but differed substantially from the issues edited by Schöne, Kil, Kny, and others

49 Michael Kny was involved in the design of the public buildings in the new district Berlin Marzahn. He was among the most renowned and talented young architects in Berlin at the time. The character Daniel Brenner in the 1989/ 90 DEFA production 'Die Architekten' is loosely based on Kny's biography.

50 Wolfgang Kil, 'In der Rückschau: Der Traum von der idealen Zeitung', Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, Siegfried Lokatis (Eds.), *Zwischen “Mosaik” und “Einheit”: Zeitschriften in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1999), p. 259 (translation by the author)

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Schöne, who was an engaged young architect in the housing combine's department for fully automatised planning and design and a member of the party, and who, furthermore, had just been elected onto the board of the local administration of the BdA must have seemed trustworthy enough to the BdA officials when they agreed to the idea for *babl*. His and the other members' motivation for the magazine, however, was anything but in line with the official's policies. Instead, they wanted to use it to develop alternatives to the current situation. 'Our chief target was the officially promoted complete demolition of entire streets and neighbourhoods to make space for new, supposedly economically more sound housing. We were motivated to make a magazine for all architects working in Berlin, in which we wanted to make ourselves and our criticism of the state's policies heard as well as to offer a forum for debate. The name *babl* was emblematic for us, and we intended to refer to the construction of the Tower of Babel as a symbol for the current situation in the GDR, which appeared to resemble the chaos of languages at the time of the construction of the Tower', Schöne remembers.⁵¹

Hence the first issue of *babl* reflected the enthusiasm and hopes of its makers. 'Acts that remain undone often lead to a catastrophic lack of consequences.'⁵² This aphorism by the polish poet Stanislaw Jerzy Lec was quoted on the folded A3 information sheet that was to accompany issue no.1. The back of this information sheet featured an ironic poster comprising key buildings of the new Berlin 'Capital of the GDR'. The magazine furthermore contained previously unpublished plans for the new district Berlin-Marzahn, a discussion with young architects, an article by architectural theorist Bruno Flierl, an article that critically discussed the subject of architectural competitions, an article about the Palace of the Republic by its architect Heinz Graffunder, and a book review. 'When we lined up with our first issue of *babl*, we must have infringed upon all rules of the strict publication system', Wolfgang Kil reports in retrospect.⁵³ Shortly after the team of editors started their work on

⁵¹ Interview between author and Jürgen Schöne (Berlin, 24 July 2008)

⁵² Quoted in *babl* 1, unpublished, (translation by the author)

⁵³ Wolfgang Kil, 'In der Rückschau: Der Traum von der idealen Zeitung', Simone Barck, Martina Langemann, Siegfried Lokatis (Eds.), *Zwischen "Mosaik" und "Einheit": Zeitschriften in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1999), p. 259 (translation by the author)

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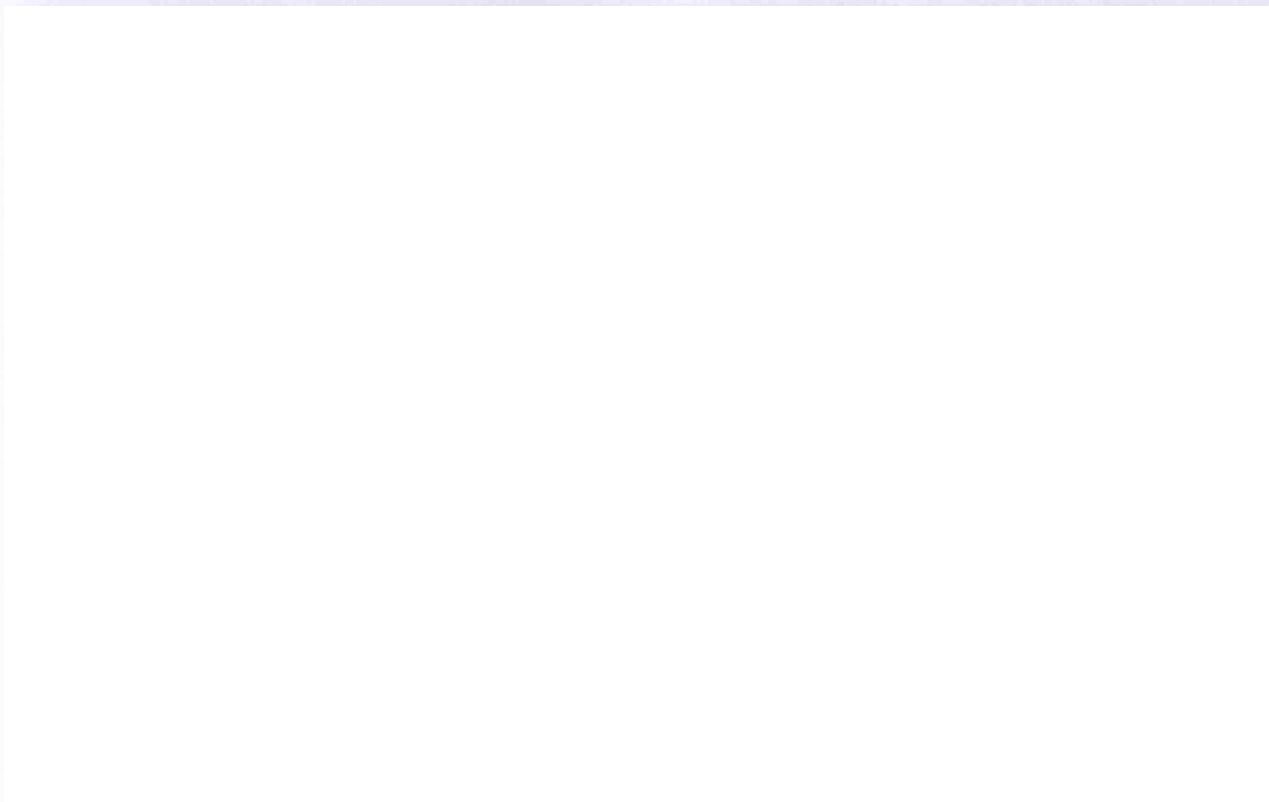
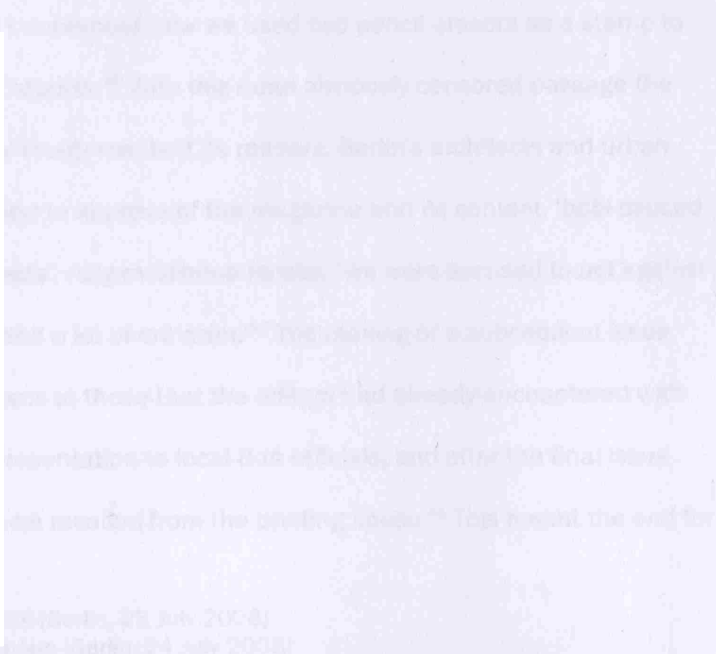


Fig. 17: Being official: the publication number of babl 1/2



Fig. 18: A second chance: title page of babl 1/2

Fig. 16: Stamped out: censorship in babl 1/2



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babl, the dream of the perfect magazine seemed to be over. Issue no.1 was censored by the local BdA administration and never got published. After the failed first issue, a second issue 1/2 was produced by the same group of editors. It took a slightly more moderate approach than the preceding one, and was further developed both in content and format. It did, however, not contain any aphorisms, and its title left no ambiguities as to its meaning; from now on the magazine carried the subtitle Berliner Architektur-Blätter (Berlin architecture pages), for which the abbreviation *babl* should stand. An editorial clarified the magazine's objectives, the information sheet contained a protest resolution calling for solidarity with the Chilean people's fight for freedom, and the poster's content was less overt and more abstract. A certain amount of articles were taken over from the unsuccessful issue no.1 in an edited or extended form and were complemented by new articles about the role of the architect, or containing background information about the work and the structural problems of the Wohnungsbaukombinat Berlin. Even though the issue was officially sanctioned before going to print, the latter article still contained a passage that provoked offence among the BdA censors. The passage in question critically commented on the architectural quality of the new public buildings in the district Berlin-Marzahn, one of the key projects of GDR mass-housing. 'This passage had to be blackened, and I remember how we used two pencil erasers as a stamp to cover the relevant section', Wolfgang Kil reports.⁵⁴ With this quite obviously censored passage the first issue of the new BdA magazine *babl* finally reached its readers, Berlin's architects and urban planners. However, not all of them seemed to approve of the magazine and its content. '*babl* caused quite strong reactions among the architects', Jürgen Schöne recalls. 'We were accused to act against the state, and I remember that we received a lot of criticism.'⁵⁵ The making of a subsequent issue no.3 was characterised by similar problems to those that the editors had already encountered with the first issue. A draft fell through at a presentation to local BdA officials, and after the final issue was finally granted permission, it had to be recalled from the printing house.⁵⁶ This meant the end for

⁵⁴ Interview between author and Wolfgang Kil (Berlin, 23 July 2008)

⁵⁵ Interview between author and Jürgen Schöne (Berlin, 24 July 2008)

⁵⁶ See Wolfgang Kil, 'In der Rückschau: Der Traum von der idealen Zeitung', Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, Siegfried Lokatis (Eds.), *Zwischen "Mosaik" und "Einheit": Zeitschriften in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1999), p. 260

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the entire editorial board of the magazine. Eventually, *babl* was continued as a little magazine by the BdA group in Berlin, but under the direction of a new, more reliable team of architect editors, who since then ran the magazine in less contentious ways.⁵⁷

Wolfgang Kil may be right when he recalls that, the short-tempered greenhorns from Berlin might have overestimated the circumstances of their time as editors of *babl*, a time that in retrospect is commonly referred to as the period of stagnation.⁵⁸ The failure of *babl*, and its level of criticism that Schöne, Kil and their fellows envisioned, however, may also have been owing to the more sensitive climate in Berlin, and the magazine's proximity to the city's and the state's construction officials. The makers of similar little magazines in other cities of the GDR were often more successful than the editors of *babl*, and, in the latter's wake, managed to produce interesting, critical and forward thinking small publications. The editors working in Rostock used their newsletter to stimulate and foster open discussions about future built projects. At the same time, the makers from Cottbus focussed on themed editions with three or four contributors, while the group in Erfurt were successful in publishing criticism, and managed to openly confront certain explosive issues.⁵⁹ Olaf Weber's articles containing architectural criticism with a strongly theoretical approach published in the Erfurt magazine are only one example that can be named in this context.

It seems remarkable from today's perspective that the making of these publications was possible within an organisation like the BdA, who was also responsible for publishing the magazine *Architektur der DDR*, that was condemned by the editors of *babl* (and the other little magazines). The local BdA magazines and newsletters, most notably *babl*, are examples of *Eigen-Sinn* within an established institution on a local level. '[T]hey created the basis for an increasingly more qualified

⁵⁷ The title and layout of the existing magazine were continued, but the subtitle was slightly altered from Berliner Architektur-Blätter to Berliner Architekten-Blätter

⁵⁸ See Wolfgang Kil, 'In der Rückschau: Der Traum von der idealen Zeitung', Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, Siegfried Lokatis (Eds.), *Zwischen "Mosaik" und "Einheit": Zeitschriften in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1999), p. 260

⁵⁹ Interview between author and Wolfgang Kil (Berlin, 23 July 2008)

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architectural discussion, [and] even though these mini-periodicals may not have succeeded in causing a “turn” in the GDR construction system, they still counteracted a complete death of thinking and criticism.⁶⁰ In this sense, and because of the fact that these magazines re-established public debate from the below, from the level of the agents, who in turn sought to develop alternative ways of communication and critical discussion about architecture in the format of these magazines, *babl* and others can be seen to have created a form of counter-public within the discipline of architecture. The next chapter is going to investigate how similar phenomena occurred in magazines that were not strictly linked to architecture, and will examine the design magazine *Form + Zweck* and its role in architectural and urban design discussions at the beginning of the 1980s as an example of alternative spaces for critique outside disciplinary boundaries.

⁶⁰ Wolfgang Kil, 'In der Rückschau: Der Traum von der idealen Zeitung', Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, Siegfried Lokatis (Eds.), *Zwischen "Mosaik" und "Einheit": Zeitschriften in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1999), p. 260 (translation by the author)

Alternative spaces 3: The magazine *Form + Zweck* in the early 1980s

The influence that *Form + Zweck*, the GDR's magazine for industrial design, exerted on the discipline of architecture and urban design during the early 1980s, marks a noteworthy example of how alternative spaces for critique often existed across the margins of related disciplines. The magazine that was founded in the mid-1950s, and that was initially published by the Berlin 'Institut für angewandte Kunst' (institute for applied arts) – later by the Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung (department for industrial design) – at the beginning of the final decade of the GDR turned into a forum for critical debate about architecture and urban design, thus significantly contributing to the then critically discussed concept of 'Komplexe Umweltgestaltung' (complex design of the built environment). In the 30 years since its inception, *Form + Zweck* had already established itself a reputation as the key magazine on all design related discourses, owing to the high quality of the theoretical and critical debates that it published on its pages. As Wolfgang Kil who joined *Form + Zweck* as a correspondent in the early 1980s noted, the GDR's magazine for industrial design was the 'top-quality product among all design related magazines [...]: down by the head, elitist, sometimes almost snobbish; [a]n island of free-thinking, and a bulwark of emphatic functionalism with contacts and authors across all European countries'.⁶¹ Over the course of the 1970s chief editor Heinz Hirdina had slowly turned the publication from a yearbook into a magazine, which was published six times a year, and which featured programmatic discussions about the social function of design and the role of designers. When Hein Köster took over the magazine from his predecessor, the focus of the magazine shifted towards historical and philosophical questions. *Form + Zweck* not only published examples of international design under the banner of functionalism but also countered the dreary situation in the GDR by publishing morally demanding intellectual discussions.⁶²

⁶¹ Wolfgang Kil, 'In der Rückschau: Der Traum von der idealen Zeitung', Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, Siegfried Lokatis (Eds.), *Zwischen "Mosaik" und "Einheit": Zeitschriften in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1999), p. 261 (translation by the author)

⁶² See Jörg Petruschat, 'Quer: form + zweck', Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, Siegfried Lokatis (Eds.), *Zwischen "Mosaik" und "Einheit": Zeitschriften in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1999), p. 269

Alternative spaces 3: The magazine Form + Zweck in the early 1980s

'Somehow, the editorial staff around Hein Köster and Dagmar Lüder also only used the rather depressing reality of the condition of design in the GDR as a vehicle to place their own topics: leftist culture as the aesthetics of resistance, but also of promise. Marx and Hegel, dialectical thinking, and the emotional affirmation of objectivity, Mart Stam and Hannes Meyer, the Shaker and the 'Frankfurter Küche'. The serial product beats the unique one, and out of all crimes ornament was the worst.'⁶³

The growing interest of the magazine's editors in the field of architecture and urban design and the increasing cooperation with members from the discipline was grounded in the idea of 'Komplexe Umweltgestaltung' or 'Komplexe Stadtgestaltung' (complex design of the built environment or complex urban design), which meant the cooperation of all agents involved in the process of designing the urban environment as an entity throughout all stages of this process. The example of *Form + Zweck*, in this respect, signalled the demand for disciplinary exchange between architecture and industrial design in order to resolve the questions that the situation of the GDR cities at the turn to the 1980s posed. Based on a wider conception of 'gestaltete Umwelt' (designed environment) as a 'Raumtotalität' (spatial totality), Hein Köster in a 1980 lead article thus called for interdisciplinary dialogue and cooperation. While the blind focus on new construction successively led to the abandonment of old quarters and their ongoing dereliction, the dictum of the housing programme and the rigidity of the construction system paired with increasing economic pressure had produced often monotonous and dreary housing districts outside the cities that were characterised by a lack of life. Komplexe Umweltgestaltung aimed at developing strategies to fill these spaces on the one hand, while its ultimate goal on the other hand was to develop strategies to design better environments in the first place. 'We experience [urban spaces] as a continuous sequence of images, material objects, light, and acts. Urban spaces are scenes of human actions formed by architecture. Without art,

⁶³ Wolfgang Kil, 'In der Rückschau: Der Traum von der idealen Zeitung', Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, Siegfried Lokatis (Eds.), *Zwischen "Mosaik" und "Einheit": Zeitschriften in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1999), p. 261 (translation by the author)

Alternative spaces 3: The magazine Form + Zweck in the early 1980s

furniture and equipment they appear empty as blown eggs.⁶⁴ The claim for interdisciplinary dialogue was however also extended vertically. Extends this claim, and calls for dialogue between all agents, however, did not only extend horizontally, across disciplinary boundaries, but also in vertical direction, as it called for cooperation and discussion between all designers of urban spaces and their users.⁶⁵ *Komplexe Umweltgestaltung* in short thus meant: Interdisciplinarity, participation and democratisation.

The fact that the magazine *Form + Zweck* not only discussed and promoted these ideas, but actually put them into practice, quickly turned it into a threat to officials in the strict construction apparatus of the GDR. The magazine united all critical forces who were in opposition to the state's official building policies and provided a forum in which to publicise their ideas and debates. Between 1980 and 1983 usually one issue of each volume was dedicated to the subject of architecture and urban design, and other numbers continuously featured articles covering the subject. The names of these articles' authors are familiar; most of them belonged to the group of critics and theorists that had already formed under the umbrella of the 'ZAG Architektur und bildende Kunst' (central working group architecture and visual arts) in the 1970s, where they could discuss their ideas, albeit not make them accessible to a wider audience. After Bruno Flierl's dismissal as the working group's leader, most of its members were also displaced into other forums.

Issue 1/ 1983, titled 'Innerstädtische Rekonstruktion' (urban reconstruction), represents a particularly strong case of the effectiveness of this cooperation, while, at the same time, it also signalled its end. In this themed issue that examined the subject of reconstruction of historic urban areas based on the example of the tenement quarter Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin, the editors and authors sought to challenge the state's official construction policies by discussing strategies for

64 Hein Köster, 'Stadträume', *Form + Zweck*, vol. 12 no. 4/ 1980 (Berlin: Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung, 1980), p. 4 (translation by the author)

65 *Ibid.*, p. 4 (translation by the author)

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reconstruction from below. Such discussions obviously completely differed from the articles in *Architektur der DDR*, in which architects reported with little criticism about the two major prestige projects in the area, the regeneration around Arkonaplatz and Arnimplatz. The authors of the articles in this issue of *Form + Zweck*, instead, came from different disciplinary backgrounds and thus presented a multitude of perspectives on the subject. The article by sociologist Fred Staufenbiel can be seen as the lead article for the issue, with its central argument that 'urban reconstruction is not only a constructional task, but a socio-cultural process'.⁶⁶ In view of such an understanding of reconstruction as a process between different agents, Herbert Pohl and Wolf Dietrich Werner published previously unreleased results of a 'Leitplanung' (proposition/ ideas plan) for the Prenzlauer Berg district, which presented thoughts and ideas regarding the area's further urban development. These plans were developed as open proposals without restrictions, and derived from the resident's living processes, hence consciously bracketed out other aspects.⁶⁷ Hein Köster's article asked whether a museum for urbanity tracing the history of the Prenzlauer Berg as an urban environment should be founded, and Wolfgang Kil raised the question whether Schönhauser Allee, one of the major axes running through the quarter, can be understood as a piece of art. In this article he challenged the notion that a 'predetermined "artistic" idea can contribute to the design of objects of the scale of an entire quarter', and, in contrast, suggested an organic concept of renewal that went beyond merely accounting for individual interests under a 'Gesamtplanungsidee' (total planning idea) but that challenged the notion of total planning altogether.⁶⁸

With this issue, more than with any other one before, *Form + Zweck* attempted a radical departure from the consensus of the official public sphere of the state and its limited publication system. It did not only discuss alternative strategies, interdisciplinary dialogue and public

66 See Fred Staufenbiel, 'Von sozialen Prozessen ausgehen', *Form + Zweck*, vol. 15 no. 1/ 1983 (Berlin: Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung, 1983), pp. 4-7

67 See Herbert Pohl und Wolf Dietrich Werner, 'Analysen und Vorstellungen', *Form + Zweck*, vol. 15 no. 1/ 1983 (Berlin: Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung, 1983), pp. 8-14

68 See Hein Köster, 'Transparenz der Zeichen' and Wolfgang Kil 'Kunstwerk Schönhauser', *Form + Zweck*, vol. 15 no. 1/ 1983 (Berlin: Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung, 1983), pp. 18-20 and pp. 23-5

Alternative spaces 3: The magazine Form + Zweck in the early 1980s

participation, it simply put them into practice, and can thus be interpreted as an example of a counter-public formed in opposition to the dominant public sphere of the state and its institutions. The officials' verdict was clear: counter-revolutionary action. The entire editorial board responsible for the issue lost their positions, and contributing authors like Wolfgang Kil subsequently were not able to place any articles on the subject of architecture in any other magazine.⁶⁹ What makes this case significant, as he points out, instead of the 'Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung' (department for industrial design), the publisher of the magazine, the Ministry of Construction was responsible for the disciplinary measure, an institution that normally had no influence on the magazine whatsoever. This may illustrate how explosive the subject of architecture and urban planning remained even in the last years of the former GDR.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ See Wolfgang Kil, 'In der Rückschau: Der Traum von der idealen Zeitung', Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, Siegfried Lokatis (Eds.), *Zwischen "Mosaik" und "Einheit": Zeitschriften in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1999), p. 261

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 261

After all: 1989 and the consequences

*'Undoubtedly, real existing socialism in the GDR historically failed [...] above all in itself, first and foremost because of the system's deeply rooted inability to renew itself.'*⁷¹

The socialist regime's implosion in autumn 1989, above all, opened new possibilities for free communication and critical discussion among all people. The obstacles that had previously hindered public debate on a broad level suddenly disappeared from one day to the other. But was it already too late? Were the system's failures too great to be overcome by those who sought to reform it? Were the disillusionment and the lack of concepts not too strong to develop true alternatives? While members of round tables, civil rights groups and initiatives across the country attempted to democratise the rigid structures of the 'self-destructed' state and to develop strategies to reform socialism, the architects had to redefine their identity as responsible individual designers and reorganise the desolate and defunct apparatus of the GDR's construction system and its institutions.

The magazine *Archivolt* was born into this time. Initiated by a number of young architects in Berlin in January 1990, and illegally published in the grey areas of a disintegrating publication and censorship system, the magazine aimed at offering a new forum for public discussion and programmatic debate. While it was well received among the despairing architects of the capital, and at first seemed to be a real success – the number of pages quickly doubled from issue 1 to issue 3 – the young magazine was quickly torn apart by the 'winds of change'. When the makers of *Archivolt* finally received an official print number that made the 6th issue of their little magazine legal, the atmosphere had significantly changed. Struggling to find their place within the competitive environment of architecture under capitalism, the magazine successively lost its audience and its

⁷¹ Bruno Flierl, *Gebaute DDR. Über Architekten, Stadtplaner und die Macht* (Berlin: Verlag für Bauwesen, 1998), p. 70

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authors. Its makers' failed effort to establish critical architectural debate in the Berlin of the post-wall months, also marked the last chapter of a missing architectural public in the history of the GDR.

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